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ABSTRACT

Presented is the executive summary of the National Study on Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting in which data from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and three U.S. territories are represented. Tables and charts are used to provide such statistical information as case status of reports, source of initial reports, 1976 family income figures for validated reports, a comparison of selected factors for neglect and abuse reports, sex of perpetrators on all validated reports, age and severity of neglect/abuse for all involved children, and type of neglect and abuse (such as lack of supervision, physical abuse, medical abuse and abandonment) on validated reports. Among policy implications listed are the need for more support services to families with abuse and neglect problems and the need to increase public awareness of what constitutes neglect or abuse. (CL)

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National Analysis of Official Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting

An Executive Summary

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In association with
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Denver Research Institute

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THE ANALYSIS

Child neglect and abuse have existed for centuries but it is only within the past 30 years that the problem has penetrated society's consciousness as an appropriate concern for public policy.

The American Humane Association with a grant from the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, began in 1973 to develop and operate a clearinghouse for national reporting on child neglect and abuse. This process has continued under the direction of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect established within the Children's Bureau by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974.

The American Humane Association has been an advocate for the rights and welfare of children since its inception 100 years ago. It has long been active in conducting research and influencing policy related to child protective services.

The National Study on Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting represents a logical step in the progression of research in this area from the early provision of protective services to children to the amassing of medical evidence of child abuse to the search for patterns and causes and on to the development of reporting procedures by social service agencies to identify the neglected and abused children and provide them with protective service. The National Study could have become a reality only after the process of public reporting had become widespread.

The absence of a central resource of national data on child neglect and abuse has often prevented efforts toward constructive planning and legislation in this area. There is a continuing need for a systematic and uniform method for gathering, compiling, and interpreting data concerning the nature of child neglect and abuse. The National Study has addressed itself to this need by testing the feasibility of systematically gathering data on the nature, reported incidence, and characteristics of child maltreatment, sources of reporting, and actions taken by receiving agencies.

It was not the intention of the project to provide a registry of families and children by name nor to measure the full incidence of the problem of child abuse and neglect in the population. The data collected was to relate solely to statistical information on officially reported cases of child neglect and abuse to state departments of social services.

The research findings represent what has been submitted by states and not an independent collection effort of the National Study and, therefore, embody the variation in quality, coverage and interpretation extant in the states.

State Participation

The overall aim of the National Study has always been to include all states and territories; to have all counties of participating states included; to have all reported cases of child neglect and abuse recorded by means of a common reporting form and to have the reporting categories defined and interpreted in the same way. This is what a truly **national** study would ideally embody. We are still far from fully realizing this ambition but we have come a long way.

The current level of state participation was carefully built over time. All 50 states, the District of Columbia and three United States territories are represented in the National Study. The 1976 data included 28 states and three U.S. territories as fully participating in the study by using a common form and sending us their data for analysis. Another 22 states and the District of Columbia collected a range of information in a variety of ways and sent the National Study their aggregate data. The fully participating states and territories in 1976 were:

Alabama	Mississippi	South Dakota
Alaska	Montana	Tennessee
Arizona	Nebraska	Texas
Colorado	Nevada	Vermont
Delaware	New Hampshire	West Virginia
Georgia	New Mexico	Wyoming
Hawaii	New York	
Indiana	North Carolina	**Territories**
Louisiana	North Dakota	Guam
Maine	Ohio	Puerto Rico
Minnesota	South Carolina	Virgin Islands

Since 1976 Arkansas, Michigan and Utah have become fully participating.

Summary Report

The National Study on Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting has issued summaries of the data submitted by states in 1974 and 1975. This report represents an executive summary of the full report of the National Study which includes a presentation of 1976 data as well as a more extensive analysis of the findings, an elaboration of trends over time and the research and policy implications of this massive array of data on child abuse and neglect reporting.

Findings

A total of 357,533 reports were submitted to the National Study in 1976. Reports were received from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands.

The reports from the fully participating states amounted to 99,579. These reports were subjected to detailed statistical analysis.

58% of these reports were of child neglect only; 27% were child abuse only and 15% were both.

Figure 1
Reports to The National Study
(N = 99,579)

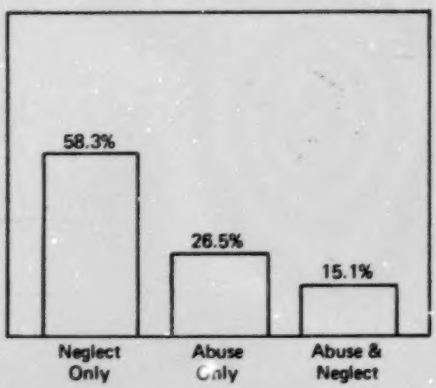
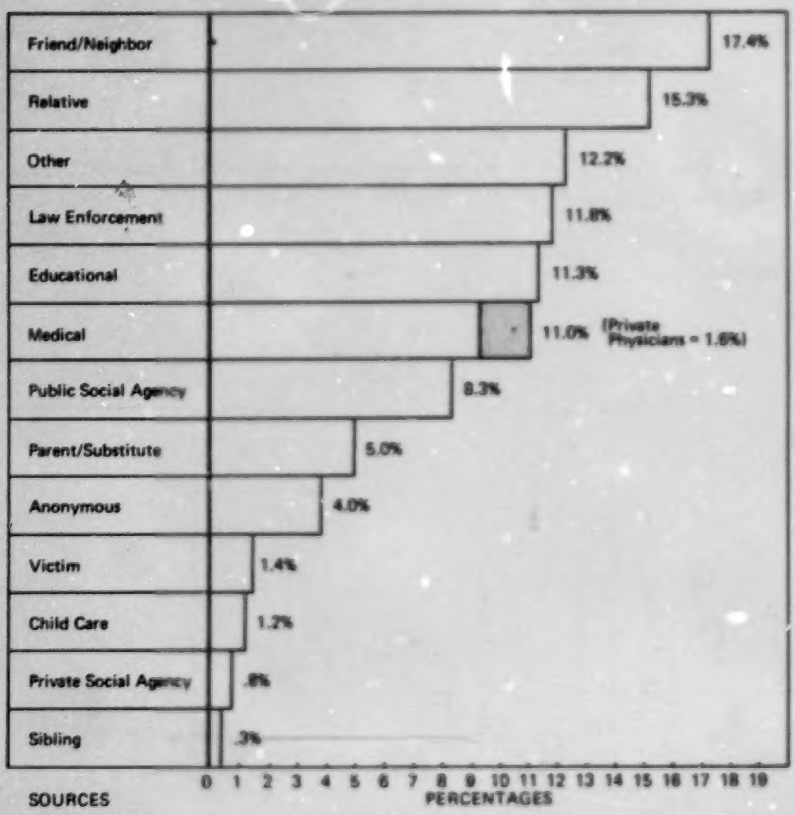


Table 1
Case Status of all Reports Received for 1976
(N = 99,579)

	Abuse Only Reported		Neglect Only Reported		Abuse & Neglect Reported		All Cases	
Validated	14,115	53.4%	26,102	45.0%	6,950	46.1%	47,167	47.4%
Not Validated	12,323	46.6%	31,953	55.0%	8,136	53.9%	52,412	52.6%
All Cases	26,438	100.0%	58,055	100.0%	15,086	100.0%	99,579	100.0%

Figure 2
Source of Initial Reports - All Cases
(N = 99,071)



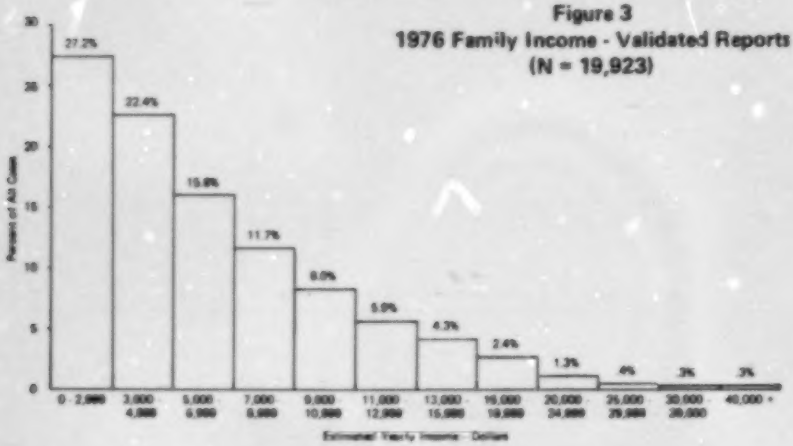
Forty-seven percent of the reports were validated. In reports of abuse only, the validity rate was 53% as compared to the neglect only validity rate of 45%. The important finding here is not that abuse is validated more often than neglect; one would expect that to be the case. What is important, however, is that neglect was validated in 45% of the cases, which is not far below the validity rate for abuse cases.

Friends, neighbors and relatives were the major source of reports. Over the past three years of data collection by the National Study, this group has consistently been the source of about 40% of the initial reports.

There were substantiated cases of child abuse and/or neglect at all income levels. However, most cases reported involved lower socioeconomic families.

In families where child neglect and abuse were substantiated, the median income on all cases was $5,050 per year. Median income is substantially higher in abuse cases ($6,890 per year) than in neglect cases ($4,250 per year). The median family income for all U.S. families in 1976 was $13,900.

Figure 3
1976 Family Income - Validated Reports
(N = 19,923)



The involved children of abuse and/or neglect remained in the home with the family in 82% of all validated cases. Criminal action was taken against the alleged perpetrators in 4% of all validated cases. In abuse only cases, criminal action was taken 9% of the time.

Alcohol dependence was considered a factor in 17% of the families in validated cases of abuse and/or neglect.

Figure 4
Family Factors Present - Neglect Only
(N = 9,241 families)

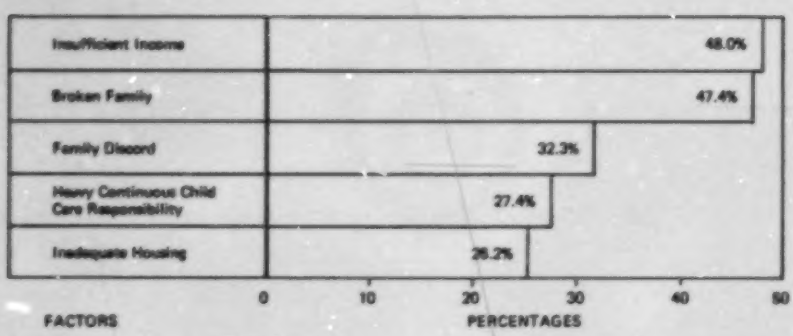
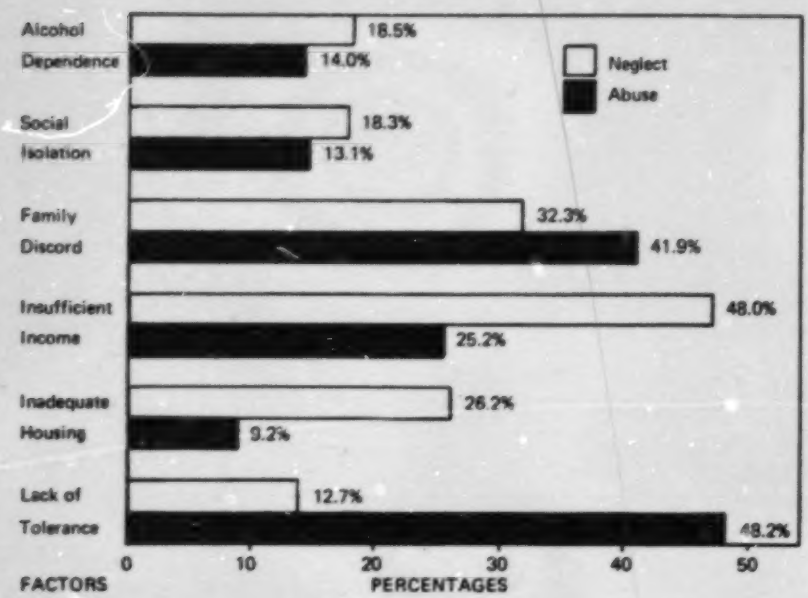


Figure 5
Comparison of Selected Factors for Neglect and Abuse Reports
(N = 16,040)



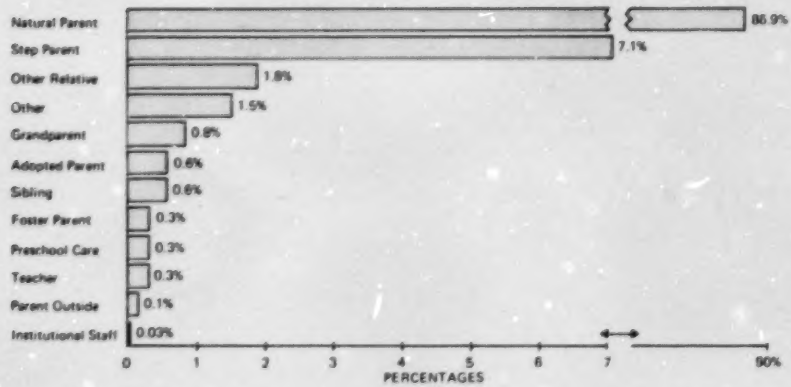
Although there are commonalities, the family factors involved in child abuse are different than in child neglect. In neglect, the relative importance of environmental stress factors (poverty, broken family, poor housing) is greater than the personal characteristics or inability to cope factors (lack of tolerance, loss of control during discipline) inherent in cases of abuse.

Females were the alleged perpetrators in 61% of the validated cases of child abuse and/or neglect. This predominance, however, is due to the neglect area; only 45% of the alleged perpetrators in validated cases of abuse only were female.

Table 2
Sex of Perpetrators on All Validated Reports
(N = 49,700)

	Males	Females	All Perpetrators
Abuse Only	7030 (55%)	6528 (45%)	13558
Neglect Only	9733 (32%)	21060 (68%)	30793
Abuse and Neglect	2153 (40%)	3196 (60%)	5349
All Cases	18916 (39%)	30784 (61%)	49700

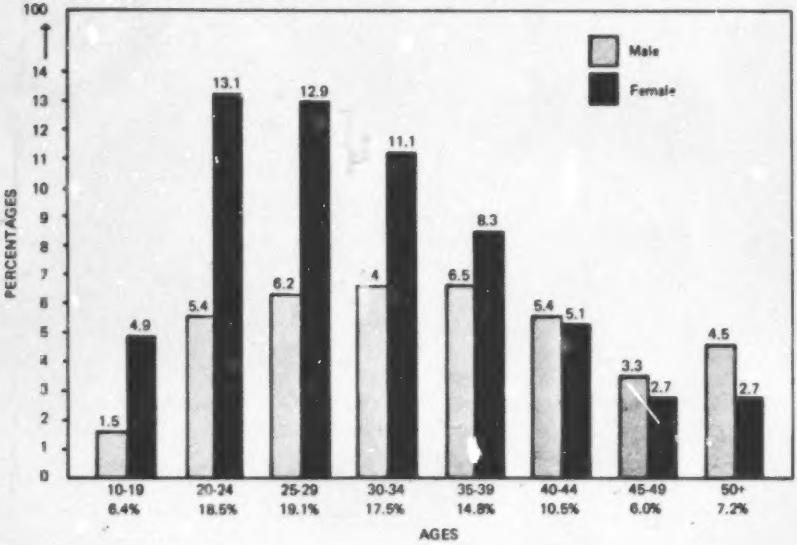
Figure 6
Relationship of Perpetrator to the Involved Child on Validated Cases
(N = 46,150)



Eighty-seven percent of the alleged perpetrators were the natural parents. This is more pronounced in neglect cases (91% were the natural parents) than in abuse cases (73% were natural parents).

More than half the alleged perpetrators on validated reports of neglect and abuse were over 30 years old. This contrasts with other research studies indicating perpetrators are generally young. The data from the states indicate only 6% were under 20 years of age at the time of the incident.

Figure 7
Age and Sex for Perpetrators on Validated Reports
(N = 50,500 Alleged Perpetrators)



Neglect and abuse is a problem which affects children of all ages. There is an almost even distribution of validated cases across the age group up to age 14 after which the cases decrease somewhat. These data strongly refute the commonly accepted notion that abuse and neglect are greater among very young children.

While children of all ages are abused and neglected, the consequences appear to be more acute for the very young. Nearly 60% of all fatalities occur in the group under two years of age. Since the measure of severity reflects primarily the medical aspects of injury, the data does not address the severity of emotional or psychological damage resulting to abused or neglected children.

Overall, there is an equal number of male and female victims on validated cases of child neglect and abuse, but there are some differences in each age group.

Figure 8
Involved Children on Validated Reports - All Cases - Age and Sex
(N = 86,502)

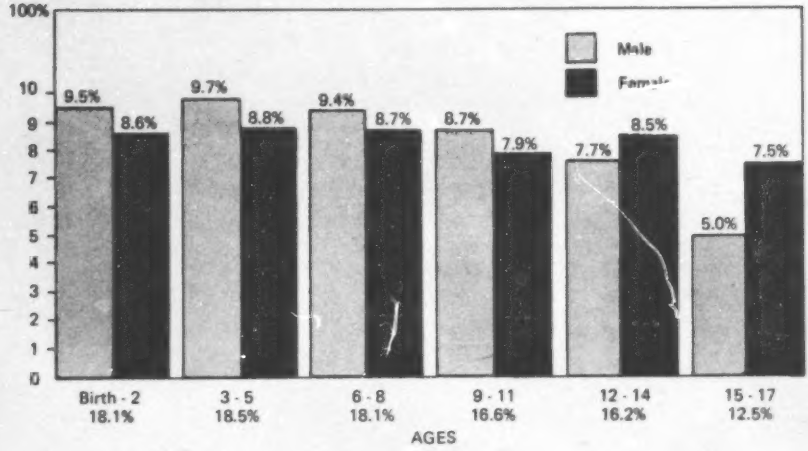


Table 3
Age and Severity of Neglect/Abuse for All Involved Children

	Age in Years of Victim							
	0-2 years		3-5 years		6-8 years		9-11 years	
No Treatment	4491	18.1%	4820	19.4%	4499	18.1%	4037	16.3%
Moderate Treatment	1720	23.3%	1376	18.7%	1265	17.2%	1148	15.6%
Serious Hospitalized	1219	58.7%	298	14.3%	174	8.4%	128	6.2%
Permanent Disability	42	57.5%	7	9.6%	5	6.8%	4	5.5%
Fatality	103	57.2%	32	17.8%	14	7.8%	10	5.6%
All Children	7575	22.0%	6533	18.9%	5957	17.3%	5327	15.4%

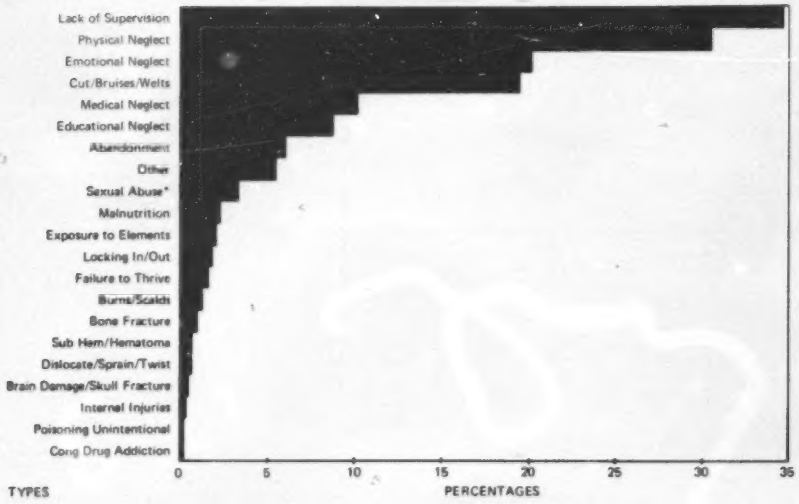
	Age in Years of Victim				All Ages	
	12-14 years		15-17 years		0-17 years	
No Treatment	4106	16.6%	2850	11.5%	24803	100.0%
Moderate Treatment	1093	14.8%	766	10.4%	7368	100.0%
Serious Hospitalized	150	7.2%	109	5.2%	2078	100.0%
Permanent Disability	6	8.2%	9	12.3%	73	100.0%
Fatality	14	7.8%	7	3.9%	180	100.0%
All Children	5369	15.6%	3741	10.8%	34502	100.0%

The number of male victims exceeds the number of females in each age group from infancy through age 11. In contrast, males are outnumbered by females for the 12 - 17 year old age group.

Table 4
Age and Sex of All Involved Children

Age in Years	Males		Females		All Children	
0-2	8244	19.1%	7428	17.2%	15672	18.1%
3-5	8351	19.3%	7624	17.6%	15975	18.5%
6-8	8113	18.8%	7552	17.5%	15665	18.1%
9-11	7538	17.4%	6815	15.8%	14353	16.6%
12-14	6672	15.4%	7338	17.0%	14010	16.2%
15-17	4319	10.0%	6508	15.0%	10827	12.5%
0-17	43,237	100.0%	43265	100.0%	86502	100.0%

Figure 9
Types of Neglect and Abuse on Validated Reports
(N = 93,249)



Even though severity is recorded in only medical terms, neglect cases are almost as severe as cases of abuse. A similar percentage of neglect cases result in

moderate injury (20%) as abuse cases (24%) and permanent disability results from 0.3% of the abuse cases as compared to 0.1% of the neglect cases.

The most common type of abuse is that resulting in minor physical injury. The most common form of neglect is lack of supervision.

Sexual abuse constituted 12% of all validated abuse cases reported.

Policy Implications

The 1976 data on child neglect and abuse reporting provides several insights to inform policymaking in the field of child protection services.

There has been some question about the mandatory reporting of neglect. Yet our data indicates not only that child neglect is the major problem confronting child protective services, but also that the severity of impact on the child in terms of medical consequences is almost as great for neglect as for abuse.

The data point to the need for more support services especially day care and homemaker services to families who have neglect and abuse problems. Since so many children remain at home and relatively few cases are adjudicated, greater emphasis must be applied on providing support services to families.

Special attention is warranted for the selection and training of social workers who are responsible for case management and counseling services to families and children.

The data indicate only about half of the reports were validated. Even though this could represent an understatement, it suggests the need to increase public awareness of what constitutes neglect or abuse rather than continue to simply stress the importance of reporting. There is also a need for more specialized intake services to facilitate appropriate referral, interpretation of agency policy, and case acceptance guidelines which minimize the load of inappropriate cases being investigated by field workers.

The 1976 data clearly indicate that the victims of child abuse and neglect are older as well as younger children. The need to adjust the services response to accommodate the special problems associated with older children is now recognized and supported by this data. It is still abundantly clear, however, that the severity of the impact of abuse and neglect is greater on the very young child.

The function of the National Study is to receive data the states collect and use for their own purposes. The development of national statistics requires reliable

data based on state reports. A uniformity of definitional categories needs to be established with a set of decision rules for transforming state data into national categories.

Future of the National Study

American Humane plans to continue research in the area of child neglect and abuse reporting. The data base has information on thousands of cases of valid referrals on child neglect and abuse. This resource will be used to complete many research efforts in the field of child protection and will be shared with others in the continuing effort to increase understanding and improve services to neglected and abused children and their families.